

College 411: Get the Scoop

A Small Group Plan to Promote College Success for First-Generation College Students

Christy W. Land, Cobb County School System and Jolie Ziomek-Daigle, University of Georgia

Abstract

First generation college students have more difficulty preparing for and succeeding in post-secondary institutions. Informed by the literature review and relevant research the school counselor presents a small group design for high school students in their junior year. This small group plan for first generation college students addresses issues of access, goal setting, career exploration, the college admissions process, and the financial aid application process. Systemic considerations are also discussed.

First-generation college students (FGCS) refers to students whose parents have no formal education beyond high school who pursue a post-secondary education (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 82% of students whose parents earned a bachelor degree or higher enrolled in college immediately after completing high school (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). In comparison, only 54% of students whose parents had completed high school but not college, and 36% of students whose parents had less than a high school degree went on to pursue a post-secondary education (Inkelas et al., 2007). Therefore, FGCS may need additional support, assistance, and interventions in their pursuit of post-secondary education.

Influences on College Bound FGCS

Ethnic and Class Considerations

First-generation students are

disproportionally low-income, non-White, and female (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Many ethnic minority first-generation students families hold the expectation that the student continue to live at home and carry out family duties while attending college, resulting in conflict of desire as students struggle to meet home and academic demands. Therefore, many first-generation students are viewed by their family as breaking and not continuing tradition (Olive, 2008). Moreover, the choice to attend college for first-generation students not only involves great gains but also loss of the familiar past and intergenerational continuity.

First-generation college students often lack the resources, advantages, and support that could make them more competitive as a college applicant (Smith, 2008). First-generation college students compared to students, who have at least one parent with a college

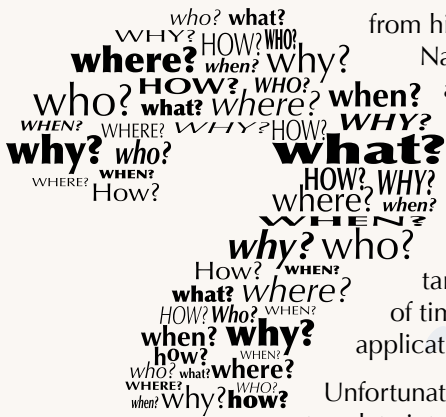
degree, are significantly less likely to attend college, and once on campus, less likely to graduate due to poor academic preparation, have lower educational aspirations, lack support, and have difficulties adjusting to the academic, social, and cultural norms of academia (Orbe, 2008). Furthermore, first-generation students make choices based on different worldviews than continuing generation students. These worldviews frame how first-generation students perceive and value college, thus, first-generation students may have lower educational aspirations (Olive, 2008).

Colleges have become more expensive, affirmative action admission programs have weakened, and federal grant programs have diminished, therefore, marginalized groups such as FCGS and individuals from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) have experienced dramatically lower access to higher education (Orbes, 2008; Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, 2005; St. John, Paulsen & Carter, 2005). Scholars who have considered the intersection of race and SES have found that while such young people may have the potential for college success, they are often derailed by the perception that college costs are insurmountable (Orbes, 2008; St. John, Paulsen & Carter, 2005).

Parental Influence

Parental involvement is one way to combat some of these barriers to equality and access to post-secondary education for first-generation college students. Parental involvement is a critical component in the success of FCGS preparing for, gaining access into, and graduating from four-year colleges or universities (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Research findings support that working class and parents from low SES backgrounds are not as engaged in their child's education as parents

82% of students whose parents earned a bachelor degree or higher enrolled in college immediately after completing high school. In comparison, only 54% of students whose parents had completed high school but not college, and 36% of students whose parents had less than a high school degree went on to pursue a post-secondary education.



from high SES status (Orbes, 2008; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Providing encouragement, setting aspirations, and active support are three broadly defined categories that capture parental involvement in college preparation and choice process (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1998; Orbes, 2008). Involvement may include college visits, summer camps, tangible financial planning, and investments of time to help their children complete college applications and financial aid forms (Orbes, 2008).

Unfortunately 'access' to education does not necessarily translate into success. First-generation college students and their parents must be involved in the college choice process in ways that acknowledge multiple barriers such as structural, race, class, and economical. To ensure access and equality for FCGS and their parents every effort needs to be made to help them negotiate such barriers

(Orbes, 2008). Stanton-Salazar (1997) emphasized that connections with caring adults within the school environment may lead youth to manage stressful borders and institutional barriers to academically succeed in school and pursue college. Intentional programming for helping FCGS succeed does not only include influential professionals in K-12 but those in the higher education community through outreach, access, and support.

Through the development and implementation of intentional, college access programs in P-16, first-generation students will receive needed support to ultimately transition from high school to college, maintain a capacity to access academic and social support while in college, and sustain a college going identity (Saunders & Serena, 2004). Intentional programming for FCGS not only addresses academic concerns, but also the social, cultural, physical, and emotional needs of these students. Academic advising, counseling, mentoring, relationship building, and educational programming can positively impact student retention, graduation rates, and academic performance (Olive, 2008).

College 411: Get the Scoop Small Group Session Plans

Rational

Potential FCGS may need additional support to be academically, socially, and emotionally able to pursue their goal of obtaining a post-secondary education. A small group plan designed for first-generation students will not only impart information but instill hope and a sense of connectedness among group members that they are not alone with their fears and challenges (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The goals of this small group plan is to enhance college aspirations and readiness, aid

with the college application process, and support transition to a post-secondary institution for first-generation college students. This group plan is designed for first-generation college students who are juniors in high school. It should be noted that this group curriculum has not been implemented and evaluated. However, research outcomes found in the literature related to the challenges of FCGS were used to design this small group plan. Group members are recruited for the group based on teacher and counselor recommendations and self-referral. Upon receipt of the referrals, the school counselor meets with potential group members to determine if they meet the criteria for the group. For individual students that meet the criteria of being a first-generation college student, a parental permission form is signed prior to the start of the group.

Session One: Taking Charge of MY Education

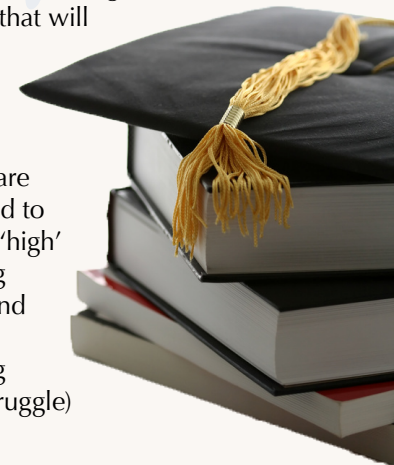
Group goals and objectives. Group members will understand the purpose and goals of the group and complete a pre-test (See Appendix A). Group members will identify concerns, challenges, and successes they have as potential first generation college students. S.M.A.R.T. goal will be described to guide their journey as potential first-generation college students. S.M.A.R.T. goals are goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (American School Counselor Association, 2012).

Materials needed. The following materials are needed for this session:

- Computer with internet connection
- Projector, screen, and speakers
- Folders for each group member
- Yarn
- Pre-test

Procedures. Group participants are welcomed to the group and the purpose/goals of the group will be discussed. The counselor discusses group rules, norms, and confidentiality. Members are given a pre-test to assess their knowledge, skills, and attitudes as first-generation students planning to pursue post-secondary education. Next, an icebreaker activity will be presented. The counselor places a strip of masking tape on the floor that will serve as a line. The counselor reads statements and if group members agree with the statement read they will step forward to the line. The group processes this icebreaker activity and discusses what participants learned about other group members and their selves through this activity.

Additionally, group participants are introduced to the high and low 'check-in' that will start each group session. Group members are encouraged to share one 'high' (something positive) and one 'low' (something that is a struggle)



The group participants are introduced to Georgia College 411 and understand how the site can serve as a resource to them. Participants create a log in ... and take the interest profiler, career cluster survey, and the career key's inventories.... Participants will also gain an understanding of the education requirements, salary, and job requirements of careers of interest.

as a way to 'check-in' at the beginning of each group session. Folders are provided to each participant and they are asked to write their name and personal mantra on the folder. An example of a personal mantra might be: "I am smart, capable, and will achieve my goals". The folders are used for group resources and are kept by the counselor until the group concludes. The group members watch personal testimonies of first-generation college students that include concerns, challenges, goals, and successes of the students (See Appendix B). They next participate in a connected web activity. The facilitator provides one member a ball of yarn and instructs that member to share something that is a challenge or a success as a potential first-generation college student. Group members are instructed to ask for the yarn if they can relate to that statement and are instructed to then share their own challenge or success and then pass the yarn on to a member who can relate, ultimately creating a web of shared concerns and successes amongst the group. Finally, the members are introduced to goal setting using the S.M.A.R.T goals format and construct S.M.A.R.T goals to guide their journey as first-generation college students.

Closure. The group members are asked to journal and reflect on their first group experience. They share round robin style one of their S.M.A.R.T goals as a first-generation college student.

Session Two: Georgia College 411 and Career Exploration

Group goals and objectives. The group participants are introduced to Georgia College 411 and understand how the site can serve as a resource to them (Georgia College 411, 2009). Participants create a log in to Georgia College 411 and take the interest profiler, career cluster survey, and the career key's inventories located on Georgia College 411 (Georgia College 411, 2009). Participants will also gain an understanding of the education requirements, salary, and job requirements of careers of interest.

Materials needed. The following materials are needed for this session:

- Computer with internet access
- Georgia College 411 log in
- Career matching cards created by the school counselor

Procedures. Group participants are welcomed and asked to share their highs and lows for the week. Participants then create a login and portfolio for Georgia College 411. A tour of the site is included to better understand the free resources available on Georgia College 411. The resources include: discovering career interests, planning high school courses, tour local colleges, financial aid assistance, and preparing for the SAT or ACT. Next, members take the interest profiler to help identify their interests and match to careers. A basic skills survey is completed to help discover what basic skills are required for given careers. Group participants then process their results by sharing "popcorn style" (encourages member participation) a career of interest and the matching skills needed. Finally, group members participate in a career matching card game. Four different sets of cards, created by the school counselor prior to the session, are presented with the following listed on the cards: title of job, estimated salary, education required, and job responsibilities. The cards should contain a variety of careers to include: manual labor, trade school jobs, and careers that require a college education. Participants try to match the cards to further learn about various types of careers and the education required, job responsibilities, and salaries.

Closure. Group members are asked to journal about careers of interest. A 'check out' is followed by stating a career that they are interested in pursuing and the education needed for that field. The counselor checks for an understanding of realistic careers goals and an understanding of what is needed to achieve that career goal.

Session Three: A Tale of Three Transcripts

Group goals and objectives. Group participants will understand how to recognize key components of a transcript such as G.P.A. and course selections. Members will understand the criteria needed for the college application process for a variety of colleges and universities. Participants will be able to identify appropriate colleges to pursue based on their transcript.

Materials needed. The following materials are needed for this group session:

- Various transcripts with identifying information blacked out
- Various college informational brochures
- Personal transcripts of group members
- Computers with internet access
- Georgia College 411 log-ins

Procedures. Group participants are welcomed to the group and share their highs and lows for the week. A transcript is presented to identify key components such as G.P.A. and course content. Next, the counselor facilitates a discussion around what

types of colleges or universities that a student with a given transcript might want to apply to. The school counselor highlights college or university criteria for a variety of schools and passes around brochures and application information for various schools. Three different transcripts are reviewed and group members discuss possible college or university matches. To end with, the members log on to Georgia College 411, explore different colleges or universities, and save schools of interest to their portfolios. Members are provided a printed copy of their own individual transcript and instructed to identify colleges where they meet the admissions criteria.

Closure. The group members are asked to journal about colleges or universities of interest. To ‘check out’ members will share three colleges or universities of interest based on a match of transcript and entrance requirements.

Session Four: The SAT and ACT: Which Test is for you?

Group goals and objectives. Group participants will understand the difference between the SAT and ACT and identify which test is best for them and meets the admission criteria for schools of interest. Members will explore test preparation opportunities through Georgia College 411 for either the SAT or ACT.

Materials needed. The following materials are needed for this session:

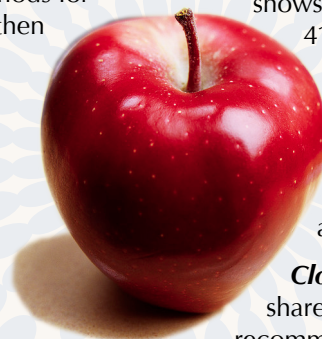
- College Board employee/volunteer to speak
- Computer with internet access
- Georgia College 411 log in

Procedures. Group participants are welcomed to the group and share their highs and lows for the week. There is a guest speaker from the College Board to provide an overview of the SAT and ACT. Next, the group members log on to Georgia College 411 to further explore the differences between the SAT and ACT and identify the admissions requirements for schools of interest. The counselor highlights the free test preparation offered through Georgia College 411 and the links to register for the SAT and ACT. Finally, participants are instructed to begin to explore test preparation for either the SAT or ACT on Georgia College 411.

Closure. Group members journal about possible test preparation methods for either the SAT or ACT. They then share which test they plan to take, when it will be offered, and the registration date.

Session Five: The College Application Process: Power of the Essay and Recommendations

Group goals and objectives. Group members will understand the college application process and the power of the essay and recommendations in the application process. Financial aid information and forms are also introduced during this session.



Materials needed. The following materials are needed for this session:

- Computer with internet access
- Georgia College 411 log in
- Sample recommendation letters written by the counselor in previous years with names removed
- Sample essays written by previous students with names and specifics removed

Procedures. Group participants are welcomed to the group and share their highs and lows for the week. The school counselor facilitates a discussion about the college application process. Next, the counselor highlights the importance of the essay and recommendations in the application process. Sample recommendation letters and essays are reviewed and members are provided examples to place in their folder for reference. Group members then log on to Georgia College 411 and practice completing a college application. A graphic organizer is discussed to help represent and categorize their ideas of possible points to include in the essay. Examples of graphic organizers include: Venn diagrams, story web, and flow charts. A discussion of who to ask for letters of recommendations and why this should be a thoughtful process is included. Finally, the counselor talks about financial aid and shows the members where they can access financial aid forms on Georgia College 411. If possible, the school counselor invites a college financial aid officer to co-facilitate this group session. The counselor points out on the website how to access information about the HOPE scholarship and FAFSA information. Group members also complete the financial aid 101 form and financial aid calculator on Georgia College 411 (Georgia College 411, 2009). A timeline is developed to guide the student through the college application process and will include important due dates related to financial aid.

Closure. Group members journal about possible essay topics. Members then share round robin style the people they plan to ask to write them letters of recommendation. They also reflect on a few of the best college options for them based on financial needs.

Session Six: College Life: Are You Ready?

Group goals and objectives. The group members will understand what it means to be a college student. They will understand academic, social, and personal expectations for post-secondary education, participate in a closure activity, and complete a post-test.

Materials needed. The following materials are needed for this group:

- Panel of people to include: college students who were first in their family to attend, school counselor, college counselor, parent of a first-generation college student, and college professor
- Paper plates
- Markers
- Post-test

Procedures. Group participants are welcomed and encouraged to share their highs and lows for the week. Parents and family members of the group are invited to attend this session to hear the panel. The school counselor utilizes the school website and/or newsletter to recruit volunteers to participate as a panel member. Panel members introduce themselves to the group. The group members have a chance to ask questions to members of the panel. Each panel member shares from their perspective the academic, social, and personal expectations for college students. After the large group discussion, each panel member takes a small group of students and parents to answer more individualized questions. Next, the panel members and parents are dismissed from the group and members participate in 'pass the plate' closing activity. Each group member is given a paper plate and asked to write their name in the center of the plate. They are instructed to pass their plate to the right where the receiving group member will write a message on the plate related to success in college. The plates are passed through the group so that each member writes a message on all members' plate. Finally, the group members are asked to take a post-test (See Appendix C). The plates and their folder with resources are sent home.

Closure. The group members share "popcorn style" one new fact about college expectations that they learned from the panel during the session.

Evaluation of the Small Group Plan

The school counselor should administer a pre-test, developed by the authors,

(See Appendix A) based on a Likert scale during the first session to assess the group member's attitude, knowledge, skills, and beliefs about college as a first generation college student. The same test (See Appendix C), developed by the authors, is administered during the last group session. Comparing the pre and post test will help determine the effectiveness of the group and if there was an increase in the group member's attitudes, knowledge, skills and beliefs about college as a first generation college student. An informal check-in at the conclusion of each group session is included to assess if the content for the group was understood and applicable to the group members. Monthly check-ins with the group members will also be completed. The school counselor should also checks to see if the group members are following their timeline that they created to assist them with the college application process.

Ongoing Support for Group Members

The school counselor should offer ongoing support to group members in a variety of ways. First, individual check-ins should be arranged with members based on the college application timeline that was created during session five. Next, workshops should be held during the student's senior year on relevant topics related to the college application process and overcoming barriers facing first-generation college students and members will be specifically reminded to attend these. Additionally, pertinent information should be posted on the school's counseling website. Classroom guidance lessons should be presented to all students on quarterly basis during their junior and senior year related to

post-secondary education options, planning, and resources. Finally, the school counselor should offer parent workshops on the college application and financial aid process for all students. These workshops should be videotaped and available to students to take home on CD. The counselor will also be available to meet with group members on an individual basis as needed.

Summary

Orbes (2008) noted that first-generation college students are significantly less likely to attend college due to poor academic preparation, lack of support and knowledge in regards to the academic, social, and cultural norms of academia. The small group plan presented offers support to first-generation college students and is designed to enhance college aspirations and readiness, aid with the college application process, and support transition to a post-secondary institution. Marginalized groups such as first-generation college students and individuals from a lower socioeconomic status have experienced dramatically lower access to higher education as colleges have become more expensive and federal grant programs have diminished (Orbes; Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, 2005; St. John, Paulsen & Cartern, 2005). Therefore, an important component of this group intervention is an understanding of college costs and access to financial aid information and applications. Finally, Stanton-Salazar (1997) emphasized that connections with caring adults within the school environment may lead first-generation college students to manage stressful borders and institutional barriers to academically succeed in school and pursue a post-secondary education. Through participation in this small group intervention, group members will build connections with the school counselor, college counselors, and other first generation college students.

There are numerous challenges facing first-generation college students including lack of parental support, socioeconomic challenges, and family expectations. Such challenges make college access and equity difficult for many first-generation college students. Counselors must advocate and offer support to first-generation college students to ensure that they have equal opportunity, access, and resources available to pursue a post-secondary education. Interventions, programming, and support must be offered across P-16 to first-generation college students and their families in order to optimize the pursuit of post-secondary education for this group of students.

Counselors must advocate and offer support to first-generation college students to ensure that they have equal opportunity, access, and resources available to pursue a post-secondary education. Interventions, programming, and support must be offered across P-16 to first-generation college students and their families in order to optimize the pursuit of post-secondary education for this group of students.

References

- American School Counselor Association. (2012). *ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs, third edition*. Alexandria, VA: American School Counselor Association.
- Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (2001). On the path to college: Three critical task's facing America's disadvantaged. *Research in Higher Education*, 42, 119-149.
- Gandara, P., Horn, C., & Orfield, G. (2005). The access crisis in higher education. *Educational Policy*, 19, 255-261.
- Georgia College 411(2009). Georgia college 411: Expand your opportunities. Retrieved from: <https://secure.gacollege411.org/>.
- Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z. E., Vogt, K. E., & Leonard, J. B. (2008). Living-learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(4), 403-434.
- Lohfink, M. M. & Paulsen, M. B. (2005). Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 409-429.
- Olive, T. (2008). Desire for higher education in first-generation Hispanic college students enrolled in an academic support program: A phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 39, 81-110.
- Orbe, M. P. (2008). Theorizing multidimensional identity negotiation: Reflections on the lived experiences of first generation college students. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 120, 81-95.
- Saunders, M. & Serena, I. (2004). Making college happen: The college experiences of first-generation Latino students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(2), 146-163.
- St. John, E. P., Paulson, M. B. & Carter, D. F. (2005). Diversity, college costs, and post-secondary opportunity: An examination of the financial nexus between college choice and persistence for African American and Whites. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 545-569.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youth. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67, 1-40.
- Yalom, I. D. & Leszca, M. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Appendix A

College 411: Get the Scoop Pre-Test

Please answer the following questions by circling the statement that best represents your answer.

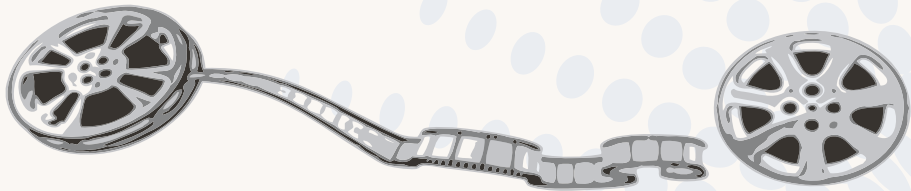
1. I understand the obstacles I could face as someone who may be the first in my family to attend college.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
2. I know what my goals are for after high school.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
3. I understand how to set and achieve realistic goals for myself.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
4. I know what career(s) I am interested in pursuing after high school.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
5. I understand what type of education and skills I need to have to pursue my career(s) of interest.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
6. I understand how to read and interpret a high school transcript.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
7. I have an understanding of the college admissions requirements for colleges that I am interested in.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
8. I know what colleges I am interested in applying to.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
9. I am familiar with SAT and ACT.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
10. I know if I plan to take the SAT or the ACT.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
11. I understand the financial aid application process.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]
12. I understand the academic and social responsibilities of a college student.
[Strongly Agree] [Agree] [Undecided] [Disagree] [Strongly Disagree]

Pre-Test Developed by Land & Daigle

Appendix B

Web Links to Personal Testimonies of First-Generation College Students for suggested use during Group Session One

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyJRICWy7xo>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2MQu5SsQZQ&list=PL472EC4C32DFDF25E>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOic7MNYhDc>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuQrDb_jiZE
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-bEb7mUwpl>



Appendix C

College 411: Get the Scoop Post-Test

Please answer the following questions by circling the statement that best represents your answer.

1. I understand obstacles I could face as someone who may be the first in my family to attend college.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
2. I know what my goals are for after high school.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
3. I understand how to set and achieve goals for myself.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
4. I know what career(s) I am interested in pursuing after high school.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
5. I understand what type of education and skills I need to have to pursue my career(s) of interest.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]

Jump to Article:

Appendix C - College 411: Get the Scoop Post-Test, continued

6. I understand how to read and interpret a high school transcript.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
7. I have an understanding of the college admissions requirements for colleges that I am interested in.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
8. I know what colleges I am interested in applying to.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
9. I am familiar with SAT and ACT.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
10. I know if I plan to take the SAT or the ACT.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
11. I understand the financial aid application process.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]
12. I understand the academic and social responsibilities of a college student.

[Strongly Agree]

[Agree]

[Undecided]

[Disagree]

[Strongly Disagree]

Please list three things that you learned from participation in this group:

I wish the school counselor would have talked more about:

My plans for after high school are:

Post-Test Developed by Land & Daigle